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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 000849

NOFORN

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ETRD SA AE
SUBJECT: SAUDIS REVOKE EMIRATI RIGHT TO TRAVEL TO KINGDOM ON NATIONAL
ID CARDS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD G. OLSON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

REFS: (A) ABU DHABI 611
(B) STATE 73217

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On August 19, Saudi Arabia announced it was revoking the right of Emiratis to travel to the Kingdom on their national ID cards and requiring passports for UAE citizens traveling to, from, or via Saudi Arabia. This move runs counter to the agreement among GCC nations which allows their citizens travel to other GCC member states using national identification cards instead of passports. According to the media reports, SARG spokesmen said the decision was ordered in protest of the UAE map depicted on Emirati ID which it believes contradicts a 1974 UAE-Saudi border agreement signed by King Feissal and Sheikh Zayed. This incident comes on the heels of several other tit-for-tat moves by the two closely-aligned neighbors, leading some observers to speculate about a potential deterioration in UAE-KSA relations. End Summary.

¶2. (U) SARG Immigration Chief told the Saudi Press Agency on August 19 that, "the Kingdom has taken the step because the map...is not in line with the border agreement signed between the two countries on August 21, 1974." This, he continued, despite several attempts to address this issue with the UAE including official diplomatic requests urging the UAE to rectify the map. According to the SARG the UAE failed to respond to this and other KSA attempts to redress the discrepancy.

¶3. (U) The UAE MFA publicly announced to its citizens August 22 that all Emiratis should carry passports when traveling to and from Saudi Arabia. In the meantime the UAE missions across the GCC are preparing travel documents for those Emiratis who need to return from or travel via Saudi Arabia but who were caught without passports at the time of the Saudi announcement.

¶4. (C) This current tiff comes after several other possible tit-for-tat actions between the two Gulf states, beginning in May when UAE lost its bid to host the headquarters of a new GCC Central Bank to Riyadh; in response, the UAE, the second largest GCC economy, pulled out of the GCC monetary union, potentially killing the project.

¶5. (C) A few weeks later, more than a thousand trucks backed up on the UAE side awaiting entry into the Kingdom (ref A). UAE customs officials reported that the problem was technical and related to the institution of a new Saudi fingerprinting system. The delays caused thousands of drivers to be trapped in temperatures of 110 degrees Fahrenheit, and UAE exports complained of damage to perishable goods; however there were no indications from either side that the delays were politically motivated. This did not stop local commentators from suggesting that the "humanitarian crisis" was a Saudi attempt to retaliate against the UAE for withdrawing from the GCC Monetary Union a few weeks earlier.

¶6. (C/NF) Comment: The vexed question Southern Arabian borders is never far below the surface, and appears to have emerged once again. The broader point is that this dispute highlights a generational

shift in the UAE, with the successor generation taking a harder edge on intra-GCC issues. In 1974, Zayed could make territorial concessions in the interest of broader unity (and since Zayed had spent his youth fighting the Saudis over border issues he had the authority to pull it off). His sons, especially Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) take a tougher line and are less likely to defer to the Saudis, as evidenced by their decision to pull out the GCC Monetary Union when Abu Dhabi did not get the headquarters. And the leadership in Abu Dhabi never misses an opportunity to let USG visitors know that they regard the Kingdom as being run by difficult and cantankerous old men surrounded by advisors who believe the earth is flat. That said, the Saudis and Emiratis remain closely aligned on issues of regional security especially on the all important question Iran. End Comment.

OLSON